availability for domestic consumers. Similarly, when there is bumper production and price crash, MEP is fixed at lower level to increase the outflow of onion from the country for the benefit of the onion growers. It is therefore a regulatory mechanism aimed at balancing the interest of producers and consumers.

Any move to waiving off MEP system may adversely affect the domestic availability and prices of onion as there may not be any control on the export and the domestic consumers may suffer due to less availability and high prices of onion and in case bumper crop of onion, the onion growers may suffer as they may not get remunerative price for their produce.

Settlement of reimbursement of losses

3063. SHRI SHARAD ANANTRAO JOSHI: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that nonsettlement of demand for reimbursement of losses amounting to rupees 30,000 crores in cotton procurement has been a contributory factor to the large number of suicides taking place in Vidarbha by cotton producing farmers; and

(b) whether the Ministry assures that the matter of reimbursement would be settled before the commencement of the cotton purchasing season this year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (PROF. K.V. THOMAS): (a) and (b) The payment to the cotton growers in the State of Maharashtra under Minimum Support Price (MSP) has already been made and dues are pending.

Potential of employment generation in agriculture sector

†3064. SHRI AMIR ALAM KHAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether employment generation avenues have declined in agriculture sector;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government has worked on any action plan for the creation of additional opportunities of employment in agriculture sector; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (PROF. K.V. THOMAS): (a) and (b) As per Population Census data released by the Registrar General of India, the number of persons engaged in agriculture sector comprising cultivators and agricultural labourers has increased from 210.68 million in 1991 to 234.10 million in 2001, registering an increase of 11.11% in ten years. According to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), (61st Round) as per Usual Status, the estimated number of workers employed in agriculture, has increased from 239.73 million in 1999-2000 (55th round) to 258.59 million in 2004-05 (61st round), showing an increase of 7.86% in five years.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) and (d) Creation of employment in rural areas is one of the policy objectives of the Government. As per the Approach Paper to the Eleventh Plan, doubling the rate of growth of agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at 4% per annum will improve rural employment conditions by raising rural wages and reducing unemployment. For the agriculture sector, a series of policy initiatives and programmes/schemes have been taken in vital areas like credit, irrigation facilities, crop diversification, marketing infrastructure, horticulture and extension services to boost investment in agriculture and allied sectors. Efforts are on to enhance production and productivity and to encourage farming as a remunerative profession. This process is being further strengthened through farm mechanization, agri clinics and agri business centres. Programmes have also been taken up to develop rainfed areas. All these schemes and programmes are expected to generate additional employment opportunities in Agriculture Sector. Several development programmes such as Macro Management of Agriculture covering Integrated Cereals Development Programme (ICDP) for Rice, Wheat and Coarse Cereals, Gramin Bhandaran Yojana, Development of Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure, Micro Irrigation, Rural Credit, Integrated Scheme of Oilseeds, Pulses, Oil Palm and Maize (ISOPOM) and National Horticulture Mission (NHM) are being implemented. Recently, Government has launched two schemes *viz.* (i) National Food Security Mission (NFSM) to increase production of Rice, Wheat and Pulses and (ii) Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) to incentivize the States/UTs to invest more in the agriculture sector, district wise.

Bio-farming

†3065. SHRI AMIR ALAM KHAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has carried out any survey with regard to use of bio-farming;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the outcome thereof;

(c) whether Government has taken any step to encourage bio-farming and provide easy financial support/loan to farmers;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (PROF. K.V. THOMAS): (a) and (b) While the Government has not carried out any specific survey with regard to use of bio-farming or organic farming, the details of area certified or under certification are maintained. Till 2007-08, area of 4.01 lakh hectares had been certified under organic cultivation, while area of 4.64 lakh hectares was under certification.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.